

The Fabric of the Past

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Big Ideas: Investigating a time when handmade was more common than store bought, an insight into creating a solid fabric from yarn.

Essential Questions: How did early West Virginians make fabric for clothes?

Social Studies Standards

SS.4.18 compare and contrast West Virginia's population, products, resources and transportation from the 18th century through modern day.

Visual Arts Standards

VA.O.4.2.4 recognize artworks demonstrating that form follows function, e.g., architecture, masks, helmets, car design, clothing.

VA.O.4.2.5 use a variety of textures in an artwork.

Learning Plan

Early in the history of West Virginia clothes were made by weaving. The cloth for clothing was made by spinning wool or flax fibers. In this lesson, students will have the opportunity to see how a ball of cotton can be used to make thread or yarn. They will weave cloth on a simple cardboard loom. The yarn spinning and weaving activities are related. Forming thread from a cotton ball will take about 20 minutes. Weaving a piece of cloth could take about four hours.

Notes to the Instructor

Questions for discussion:

Have you ever seen anyone use a spinning wheel? If so, how did they make the yarn?

Have you seen anyone use a loom? If so, how big was it and how did they make the fabric?

Today we wear woven fabric and knit fabrics. Can you tell the difference? (A magnifying glass can be used to view the difference woven and knit fabrics).

Students should view and discuss the following photograph:



Activity 1

To demonstrate how yarn is formed, fluff a ball of cotton. Gently hold the cotton ball in one hand and begin to twist and pull the fibers to form thread. Roll the fibers in one direction between your fingers, making sure to hold onto the twist and not let it go. Keep drawing and pulling out from the fiber source and twisting in one direction. If each student is given a ball of cotton, they could see who would make the longest piece of yarn from their ball.

Activity 2

Cloth is made by weaving yarn on a loom to form a solid piece of cloth. Students can experience weaving using a corrugated cardboard loom.

Cardboard Loom Weaving

Weaving can be done by cutting notches (or slits) in the short sides of a 5" x 8" piece of corrugated cardboard. Mark 1 cm across the top and bottom of the cardboard. Cut slots in the cardboard at the marks for the loom. Use yarn to "warp" the loom, or string yarn from the top to the bottom and then from one slot to the next across the back of the loom and repeat until all slots are filled. The ends can be knotted to the yarn on the back to the adjacent yarn.

Use a length of yarn about 15 feet long to weave across the top of the loom. Each row is a series of over and under the warp yarn from one side to the other. The last warp thread is then the beginning of going back through the sequence. When the thread is finished under, the next row goes around the last yarn and then threaded over and under in the opposite sequence.

When the yarn runs out, push the woven yarn up and proceed with a new 15-foot piece of yarn. There is no need to tie the yarn, simply begin weaving. When the weaving is tight on the cardboard loom, it can be popped off. The completed weaving can be used as a mat, or a dowel stick can be worked into the loops at one end and a hanging yarn can be attached for hanging.

Materials and Other Resources

Cotton Balls

Cardboard for each student (5" x 8")

Scissors

Yarn

Dowel Sticks (optional)

Weaving on a cardboard loom [video](#)